



DAYS OF CHIVALRY.

A ROMANCE.

Though now no more thy crested chiefs advance
In arm'd array, nor grasp the glitt'ring lance ;
Though knighthood boasts the martial pomp no more,
That grac'd its gorgeous festivals of yore :—

WARTON.

—Yet hear the tale, that tells such once were known !

VOL. I.

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Amusement



P R E F A C E.

FICTITIOUS histories are now so noticed by Readers of all ranks, that an apology, for adding one small pittance to the general stores, is entered upon with less diffidence than might otherwise have been felt.

Amusement in reading being the chief object of the many, and not rejected by the few, it were surely to be wished that the species of writing calculated for this purpose were raised to a rank even more respectable than that it now possesses.

This can only be done by those who unite at once talents, nice judgment, the treasures of literary knowledge, the advantages of travelling, and all those exquisite feelings which teach the imagination to touch and to instruct the human

human heart. That such writers might not scorn to employ their valuable resources in rendering this branch of literature more advantageous to the numerous class of female readers, and less unworthy the perusal of the student, the grave, and the aged, all, who regard the amusements of life as very nearly affecting its happiness, must most cordially wish.

The following little tale, far too trifling to fear the censure of the liberal, dares not assume the pretension of contributing in the smallest degree to this desirable

end. The Writer has caught too much of the notions of chivalry to rejoice, should that praise be bestowed which she is conscious is unmerited.

To pourtray a portrait of times past, with those fine touches which render it worthy the look of Taste, requires a command of tints, at present beyond the reach of the hand that scrawls this feeble sketch.

There is one merit, which even the most humble may presume to boast of, and which the
most

most exalted should endeavour to possess. It must be remarked with pain, that the renowned, the admired, and the first, in the style of writing which they have chosen, sometimes, without being aware of the infringement, have glided from the nice boundaries of rigid morality.

That I have engaged my hero in a single combat would call for excuse, for justification, did it not find its full defence in being only a trait of the barbarous customs of the times, in which the scene of the story is laid.

Perhaps,

Perhaps, in the twelfth century, this instance of rude manners might present an apology it cannot now pretend to.

Introduced by the Normans, among the other absurd trials by ordeal, it was used as a test of truth and right ; but, in an age which vaunts of a morality refined to the purest standard, this custom must stand a glaring dishonour to civilization, and an infamous reproach to true bravery.

When men of genius, condescending to become Novelists, represent

represent their distinguished character retaining sentiments that engage him in countenancing this relic of antient barbarism, must we dare to condemn, or silently bewail, an inadvertency so unaccountable?

In works that possess no claim to favour, except their harmlessness, and which have no renowned name affixed, as the well-known buckler to guard them from neglect, a mistake of an immoral nature would be still more unpardonable.

They

They must seize for their shield
innocence of intention ; and if,
no worthier recreation being by,
they obtain a few minutes regard,
when the coffee smokes in the
urn, and the sofa is wheeled to
the fire, their authors must hear
and approve, should the clement
sentence, as the book is closed, be
“ AN UNOFFENDING TRIFLE.”

DAYS



DAYS OF CHIVALRY.

CHAP. I.

A tale of the times of old — the deeds of days of
other years —

OSSIAN.

IN the heroic reign of Richard the
First, when the Normans had im-
ported into England the exalted ideas
of Chivalry, lived Roger de Mainfroy,
surnamed the *Severe*, a turbulent and
VOL. I. B haughty

haughty baron; of Norman extraction. He governed with a sternness and rigour, not extraordinary in those times, his military vassals and his serfs; the absolute slavery of the latter being nearly equalled by the servile obedience of the former.

His daughter and only heir, the Lady Matilda, had lost in early infancy a mother, whose condescending yet dignified gentleness somewhat allayed, though not tamed, the native ferocity and stubbornness of her lord's temper. On the death of this valued parent, the Baron had placed his beautiful daughter under the care of his maternal aunt, Abbess of the convent
of



of the Holy Trinity at Rouen, in Normandy. Here, beneath the discipline of a severe order, and the tuition of a rigorous nun, the gentle Matilda passed her infancy and youth, till she attained the age of eighteen, when her father, whose austere disposition could only bend at the soft touch of paternal affection, summoned her to attend him at his castle in England.

In her person, the heir of Mainfroy was tall, and gracefully slender ; there was a lightness in her form, and a nimble ease in her movements, that frequently gave her the semblance of some gliding spirit. The sprightliness of her temper, untainted by the

gloom of the monastery, corresponded to this appearance. Having been immured nearly her whole life in her solitude at Rouen, the world was to her lively imagination a scene of unexplored wonders; yet, warned by the admonitions of the wise Abbess, as well as by her active good sense, she was aware that it was likewise a scene of adverse accidents, a state that continually demanded caution and effort.

She was accompanied to England by a female domestic, whose attachment and age gave her more the title and privilege of an instructor than a servant. Raising this faithful friend to a companion, the lovely Matilda passed
her

her time with the sage Therefa, in the apartments allotted for her in the long gallery over the council-chamber.—

At the end of this gallery, a window of fretted stone-work gave a view over the terrace, from which the eye could just reach the tufted summits of one of those forests that owe their gloomy recesses to the love of hunting, brought by William of Normandy with him into England.

Among the dependents of the Baron, there were none but dreaded his tyranny with the most abject terror, except the faithful attendant of the Lady Matilda and Geoffry, the old steward of the castle. The servile

offices in which Therefa was engaged, and the little concern ſhe had with her lord, removed her in part from his notice, and conſequently ſhe felt leſs dependent on his will. Geoffry, who, being a land proprietor, was a vaſſel of the crown, from this circumſtance found his ſubmiſſion to his meſne-lord acquire ſomething of independence. The long time he had lived with the Earl of Mainfroy had made him unwilling to quit his ancient home, for a ſtate of private comfort, which it was in his power to have poſſeſſed.

He therefore reſigned his property to his grandſons, and determined to breathe his laſt ſigh in the caſtle, and

repose his white hairs in that chapel where, for sixty years, he had daily kneeled at the crucifix.

One evening the Lady Matilda was sitting alone in her apartment, reading a manuscript, which she had found in a closet, containing the songs and stories of the Trobadores, the wild fancy of whose verses wonderfully caught her imagination. She was just in the middle of an interesting tale, called The Legend of the black Knight.— Her fancy had painted the knight in fable armour, pursuing with his bare sabre a bloody form that beckoned him through a dark vault. Her wavering lamp was now nearly spent ;—

the embers on the hearth burned faint, and the chamber seemed sinking into gloom.

These circumstances wrought her imagination into a kind of horror that made her catch with alarm the sound of footsteps passing, at a distance, over the stone floor of the gallery; they drew nearer and nearer: they stopped, and the creaking door, to which Matilda turned with a sudden start, disclosed Theresa, entering with a look of settled perplexity and terror.

Matilda, losing her ideal fears in the apprehension of some real alarm,
hastily

hastily closed her book, and made a sign to Theresa to sit down by her on the low couch, covered with painted leather, which stood under the high and deep Gothic arch of the window.

“Alas ! my dear lady, (cried the trembling Theresa, trying to still the agitation that shook her aged frame,)—our peaceful life, the serene days we have passed, are now indeed at an end. This castle will no longer afford a retirement almost as tranquil as that of our convent. As we sat together in the little hall, Geoffrey disclosed to me this fatal secret.—‘ Our lord (said he) is embarrassed in an af-

fair which will involve him in war.— His adversary is no less a personage than the king himself, who, it is expected, will send a detachment to meet the forces of the Baron. They will not engage near the castle, and the vassals are all ready to march.— 'Console our young lady,' (said Geof- fry,) and hastily left me."

Here Theresa ceased, and the un- happy Matilda, who had listened in silent astonishment and dismay, gave way to all the terrors which a young and gentle soul could feel at the horrors of war. Accustomed only to the solemn retirement of a convent, they
funk

sunk upon her heart with a piercing pang.

The few parental caresses which the Baron's austerity had permitted him to bestow on his daughter, and the short time she had known him as a father, allowed her not to experience for him that exquisite affection which would otherwise have been her glory, but duty and reverence still interested her deeply in his fate.

"Thus may I lose, (exclaimed she, in an agony of grief,) the only parent heaven has left me!—Severe as he is, the few marks of tenderness he bestows on me are yet precious to
my

my soul. But (added she, a little recovering herself) my fears may be disappointed, — my father may be victorious, — but victorious over whom ?”

Lost in a tumult of apprehensions and surmises, she sat awhile silent, and the good Theresa seized this opportunity of reviving those sentiments of rigid duty and resignation which the instructions of the holy Abbess had inculcated.

“ My dear young lady, (said she,) recollect those lessons which our wise Superior so often repeated, not only to our order in general, but in
private

private to you. How, at midnight, when our rules did not call you to prayer, would she lead you to the shrine of St. Agatha, and at that solemn hour seek to pour into your soul the pious patience of that holy Sicilian virgin!—

“ Yes, my beloved child, suffer me to call you so, (added Theresa,) fix in your heart that invaluable fortitude,—the first, the only blessing which can lead you through the warfare of this wretched world. Your station particularly demands it.—The only heir of a noble ancestry, the last of the line, may have difficulties to meet which will render your conduct,

duct, if guided by this blessed monitor, worthy even of that martyr to whom you have been taught to pray as your sacred guardian."

Saying this, the faithful Theresa rose, and, taking the Lady Matilda by the hand, led her to a closet in the apartment, where, on a small altar, covered with black velvet, stood a crucifix of ivory, over which was suspended a picture of St. Agatha, kneeling, and pointing to the instruments of her martyrdom.

"Here let us kneel, (said Theresa,) and calm this hour of terror by our prayers and resignation."

Matilda

Matilda kneeled down by the side of her aged instructor, and, after a few minutes spent in solemn devotion, she rose with a firm fortitude in her soul, that made her return into her apartment with steps if not as sportive, yet as light as before her late alarm.

They were scarcely seated again, in the chamber, when Margareta, a young girl who had been educated in the convent at Rouen, and given to Matilda by the Abbess for an attendant, entered, with some fried lampreys for supper, the Baron wishing that night to sup alone.

She

She spread the table before her mistress with a hurried air, and, nobody speaking, she could not forbear giving vent to her own alarm.

“ O my kind lady ! (cried she, fixing her eyes full of tears on Matilda,) would we were all in our convent again !—What a dreadful thing must a battle be !—This morning, when I saw Anselm, the keeper of the arms, come down from the tower where our armory is, and eight or nine more, laden with swords and scabbards, how my heart quaked !—I followed them to the great hall, and hid myself behind a long standard that stood in a corner. Oh ! how I trembled

trembled when I saw the plumes of the helmets, and scouring the shields and greaves, for so Anselm told me they were called. O madam !—O good Theresa ! entreat my lord to send us back to Rouen !”

The condescending Matilda endeavoured to still the terrors of the poor girl by assurances of kindness and protection ; Theresa joined some pious admonitions, and with difficulty prevailed on Margareta to return to her own apartment, the way lying through the great hall, where the black helmets, the fabres, and the waving banners were, at this gloomy hour, objects of terror to the youthful and

superstitious temper of the simple yet curious damsel : they then laid down to repose, Matilda in an inner chamber, and Theresa in an adjoining closet.

CHAP. II.

'Tis done !—I am a slave !—The fatal vow
Has pass'd my lips !—Methought, in those sad mo-
ments,

The tombs around the saints, the darken'd altar,
And all the trembling shrines with horror shook.

THOMSON'S TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

THE next day the Lady Matilda
passed without any material oc-
currence.

The Baron, at the hour of meals, seemed somewhat to relax his natural austerity. A gentle and tender look, which he frequently bestowed on his daughter, darted through her soul, and gave a keener pang to her fears on the ensuing occasion.

The cause of the unhappy quarrel between the Baron and the King, which had not been divulged by Geoffry to the faithful Theresa, was as follows.

Some of the Baron's vassals, in digging the foundation for a cottage on the precincts of the neighbouring forest, found, at a short distance from

the surface of the earth, an iron chest, which, on forcing open, he perceived to contain an immense treasure in nobles and marks.

The peasant, who was of an upright disposition, gave all he had discovered into the Baron's hands. The haughty Mainfroy, as vassal of the crown, was obliged to restore the treasure to the king. This he did but in part ; and Richard, irritated that the Earl had dared to retain the right of the crown, determined to recover it by force. He therefore prepared a detachment under the command of Egbert, Earl of Athelney, his favourite

vourite Baron, who was of Saxon descent.

The fierce and warlike Mainfroy disdained to submit, but sternly resolved to meet the king's troop, and defend his conduct. The third succeeding day was fixed upon for the decision.

On the evening before the fatal morning, Matilda received a summons from her father to attend him. She obeyed trembling, thinking he was going to commit some charge to her, in case he should return no more.

She

She hastened to the council-chamber, and gazed some time ere she perceived the Baron. The long extent of the apartment, — the small gloomy casements, whose thick stone stanchions suffered but little light to pass through the dim panes, — the hue of the tapestry, which was of a black ground, and wrought with figures of armed knights, representing some atchievement of William the Conqueror, — conspired to render the room so dark, that Matilda looked in vain for her father.

She had left Margareta with the lamp at the door, and there was no

light in the chamber. At length she descried the Baron walking at the far end. He was partly in armour, with his casque on, but his vizor up.—The black plumes of his crest waving over his dark and frowning eyebrows, gave a still more stern air to his countenance. He was pacing the room as if in agitation, but the crossed posture of his arms, and the fixed resolution of his aspect seemed to indicate a forced and ferocious steadiness.

“Matilda, (said he, in a softened tone,) I have sent for you, to give perhaps my last commands.”

Matilda

Matilda trembled, while he thus continued : “ Dismiss your attendant yonder ; — take her lamp, and follow me into the subterranean chapel.”

Matilda trembled still more, but obeyed in fearful silence ; and, taking the lamp from Margaretta, followed the Baron.

He entered an inner court, which he crossed, and stopped at a small door, in a corner tower. Bidding Matilda hold the lamp to the key-hole, he applied a key, which, with some difficulty, he turned, and forced open the door.

It

It admitted them into a narrow vaulted room, at the opposite end of which was another door, but much lower, and seemingly half concealed in the ground. This, without unlocking, the Baron pushed back with his arm, and it disclosed a dark and descending staircase.

Matilda felt her heart beat more and more violently ; she could not understand why the injunctions of her father could not have been given in any apartment. She knew there was a chapel underneath some tower of the castle, but she had never seen it.

The

The stillness of the hour, the solemn manner of the Baron, and her dreadful apprehension of the morrow, made her curiosity now partake of terror.

The Baron descended first ; the stairs were narrow, steep, and broken ; they seemed not formed of hewn materials, but cut rudely in the solid rock. Having passed about forty steps, the Baron reached a low-arched passage. The arches, receding behind each other, at length closed in a double folding door, the pointed arch of which rested on each side, upon a crucifix, carved in the stone of the rock. The Baron applied a large
key

key to the door, and one half flew open.

The fearful Matilda, close behind, involuntarily laid one hand on her father's furcoat, while with the other she dared hardly raise the lamp to survey the dark, the solemn vault, thus far from human eye devoted to purposes of religion.

The Baron entered the chapel, and proceeded up the middle aisle, which was of considerable extent. Matilda followed with trembling feet, that scarcely touched the pavement, which was chequered with black and white marble.

As

As she passed along, the light of the lamp, through the vaulted arches on each side, just reached the shrines of several saints placed against the wall, and catching the carved figures and rude grotesque work, struck her fancy with solemn awe.

The Baron advanced to the extremity of the chapel, where, in a wide vaulted recess, was the high altar.— On it stood a black image of the Virgin, accompanied by many precious relics.

The Baron, turning under an arch on the right hand, opposite the shrine of St. Michael, the tutelary saint of Normandy,

Normandy, bade Matilda set the lamp on the altar.

Her reverence of the scene, and dread of what was to come, usurped the place of curiosity, and without examining the altar, or casting one look on the rich attire of the virgin, she obeyed. The Baron stopped at the foot of a splendid tomb. It was built of white marble. On the pedestal were carved many devices of standards and warlike instruments.—The figure of a knight in armour, much larger than life, leaned upon a vast shield, where was seen a palm-tree rising on the back of an elephant,

phant, and folding its branches into the form of a cross,—the device worn by the Earls of Mainfroy. The head of the knight was without his casque, and the sculptor with wonderful art had represented his scull as if cleft by some mighty blow.

“ My child ! (said the Baron, addressing Matilda with an affectionate look,) to-morrow I am going——”

He stopped abruptly.——

“ To morrow (resumed he) I must vindicate myself, by encountering the arms of a rapacious monarch.—

If

If heaven should ordain it, thou mayest never more behold thy father !”

Matilda melted into tears, and sunk on her knees in an agony of distress.

The Baron continued, while he stretched out his arm to raise her,—
“Take this embrace, and take my benediction. Perchance I have been too severe,—but all is past !”

Matilda, at this slight self-reproach, felt all the energy of filial affection rush into her bosom:

“I

“I am now going (pursued the Baron) to enforce my last command, —nay, more than command.—Rise, and listen.

“Look on this tomb.—Thou seest in that knight, Lanfranc de Mainfroy, my father, the lineal descendent of the illustrious William of Normandy. In a solemn tournament, held before the English court, Lanfranc encountered a Baron, of Saxon origin, named Ethelbert.

“This single combat was managed on both sides for a long time with the most stern valour. The Saxon at length, by a violent stroke on the

helmet of Lanfranc, severed the underpart of the vizor, and the casque, thus broken, fell from his head to the ground.

“ Thus, unarmed, the intrepid Lanfranc would have continued the fight, but the judges of the field hastened to prevent him; when, impious violation of those illustrious rules of honour, which this barbarous island owes only to our Normans! the treacherous Ethelbert raised his profane arm, and with a rapid blow of his sabre, cleft the defenceless scull of his brave foe.

Thus

“ Thus was thy grandfere murdered,—basely murdered !—To this, his tomb, I have now brought thee, not only to bedew it with thy tears, but——”

Suddenly he stopped; his voice and manner grew more and more fierce. Matilda started. “ But, (added he,) to hear my will, and to obey. Thou knowest, if I return no more, thyself my sole heir; and, by the laws of this realm, as Barones of Mainfroy, must accept from the king whatever husband he will give thee. Shouldest thou refuse, all thy estates are forfeited to the crown. — This severe

law thou art already acquainted with.—

“Now kneel before the tomb of this thy injured ancestor, and swear—”

Matilda's frame shuddered at the last word.—“*Swear!* (added the Baron, in a determined tone of steady rage,)—by that blood so basely shed, not to accept from the hand of the King, a husband of Saxon origin.

“Shouldst thou dare (pursued he, raising his voice so high that its angry echoes sounded through the vaults of the chapel)—to mingle the line of Mainfroy with that of the barbarous, of
the

the perfidious Saxons, may the curses of a **DISOBEYED PARENT** alight on thy rebellious head !”

The terrified Matilda heard, in silent dread and astonishment, the place,—the hour,—the kindness of her father’s first address,—the interest her duty told her she ought to take in the injuries done to her family, conspired to soften her soul into the most compliant tenderness; while the fearful idea of a vow, thus solemnly taken, struck with horror her young and gentle mind. The influence it might have on her future happiness also had some share in the tu-

mult of her reflections. Implicit reverence for the will of a parent, whom she was perhaps on the point of losing for ever, gave her no room to hesitate.

The Baron, in a determined tone, dictated the terms of the vow, and Matilda's faltering voice, agitated with terror, repeated the dreadful words. As she uttered the concluding accents, an effort of fortitude roused her soul, and she repeated them with a firm and steady resolution to fulfil the solemn engagement.

The Baron, now passing over to the shrine of St. Michael, crossed himself,

self, and repeated a short ejaculation ; then, making a sign to Matilda to take up the lamp, hastened to quit the chapel.

They walked swiftly through the arched passage, ascended the stairs, and, returning across the inner court, Matilda followed her father to his apartment.

“ Adieu, Matilda, (said he gently) to thee I entrust the honour of the house of Mainfroy. Had not the accident of my quarrel with the King been unforeseen, I should have contracted thee to some noble of my own

race; but fate has crossed my intentions.

“Forget not thy vow! — Rather let thy illustrious line be extinct, than profaned by an unworthy alliance,—rather do thou return for ever to thy convent, and let all my possessions be parted from their heirs.”—

So saying, he embraced the tender and afflicted Matilda, and, mildly blessing her, waved his hand for her to leave him.

She obeyed with reluctance, and, as she passed down the gallery, still
fixed:

fixed her eye on that door which
 closed from her view a father whom
 she now held more dear than ever.



CHAP.

CHAP. III.

Ere the ruddy sun be set,

Pikes must shiver, jav'lines sing ;

Blade with clatt'ring buckler meet,

Hauberk crash, and helmet ring.

GRAY.

MATILDA passed the greater
part of this agitated night on
her knees before the shrine of St.
Agatha, supplicating all the saints to
shield

shield the life of her father. The good Theresa, from whom, through motives of prudence, she concealed what had passed in the subterranean chapel, was by her side, endeavouring to fortify her soul.

At break of day they ascended the battlements of the tower that overlooked the heath, across which the Baron with his warriors were to pass to the encounter.

They waited not long in trembling expectation, ere the great portals creaked, and the martial squadron, winding round the angles of the castles, appeared. A fight so new would

have interested the curiosity of minds so unused to scenes of arms, had not their anxiety and distress obliterated such sensations. The crests, — the shields, — the hauberks, — the standards, — the trappings of the steeds, — would each have been an object of wonder, but Matilda could only gaze on her father, who marched solemnly at the head of his troops.

They were divided into three lines; the first formed of archers, the second of light infantry, and the third of cavalry. The affrighted females pursued them with their eyes, as they moved along the heath, till the ban-

ners

ners no longer were seen to wave over the tip of the distant ascent.

Matilda, unable longer to sustain her tottering frame, as she lost sight of them, sunk down upon the battlement, and Theresa with difficulty conveyed her to her apartment.

The day was passed by all that remained at the castle, consisting of few more than the Lady Matilda, Theresa, Margareta, and Geoffry, in the greatest consternation. Matilda continually visited the turret, overlooking the heath. Evening now approached, yet brought no tidings. The stealing mists began to roll over the

the brown extent, and tinged the extremity with a soft grey.

At length she descried something that moved in the dim distance; as it advanced nearer and nearer, she could distinguish men on horseback, behind whom were others, by the lowness of their appearance, seemingly on foot.

The first party approached the castle. Matilda now perceived that it consisted of a few vassals of her father, the sad remains of the fatal day. They furrounded a person, seemingly a prisoner.

The

The foot-party approached much slower ; when they were under the tower, she found they bore something laid on their shields, which they had crossed over each other in form of a litter. The dimness of the evening, and the soldiers crowding close together, prevented her discerning what or whom it was.

In trembling terror she hastened down, and scarcely knew whether her tottering feet were carrying her, when she found herself in the outer court, and, by the torches that Geoffry and the other domestics held round, she saw her father supported
by

by the pale soldiers, his head resting on a buckler placed assant.

Her horror and distress, to find her apprehensions thus fatally confirmed, suffered her not to perceive that he was breathless; and, seizing a purple scarf, of embroidered work, that she wore, she tried to bind it round his side, which, through the plates of the armour yet bled.

The horsemen had now alighted, and in this instant the attendants raised the Baron, and hastily hurried with him into the castle. Matilda, shrieking, was held back by Geoffry, and Theresa and Margareta now arriving,

arriving, they conveyed her to her apartment ; in her struggle to follow her father, the scarf dropped from her hand in the court.

- The corpse of the Baron was laid in the great hall, the vassals watching round it all night.

Matilda, notwithstanding the care and admonitions of Theresa, continued in a state between stupor and agony, nor was her fortitude revived without repeated efforts.

Theresa, whose affliction was less keen, the next morning inquired of

the vassals an account of the fatal engagement. From them she learned that the battle on both sides had been obstinate.

The Baron had distinguished himself by the most ferocious valour.—He singled out the Earl of Athelnay, commander of the king's forces, and drawing him apart out of the ranks, had nearly overpowered him, but for the arrival of a young knight, the Earl's chief favourite, who, seeing his danger, hastened to his succour, and drove back the Baron's arm.

Athelnay, by a vigorous stroke, now thrust his sword through the side
of

of his foe, and a party of the Baron's soldiers rushing on the intrepid youth who had dared the danger in rescue of his lord, disarmed, and bound him a prisoner, while the Earl was raising his sword on the Baron.

This was the knight Matilda saw escorted to the castle, and whom her distress prevented her noticing afterwards, though he stood by the Baron's body in the court. He was conveyed to a secure apartment as prisoner of war.

At the end of six days the Baron was interred, according to his desire, in the subterranean chapel, near the

E 2

tomb

tomb of his father. The disputed treasure was then restored to the King.

MATILDA was now become Baroness de Mainfroy, possessed of vast estates, with no near or distant kindred, save her aunt, the Abbess of Rouen.

When a few weeks had elapsed since the unhappy battle, her grief acquired

acquired a sort of serene dejection.— She roused all her fortitude to sustain her in the new character she was now to act.

Geoffry one morning begged permission to enter her apartment, and informed her that the knight, belonging to the king's army, was still a prisoner in the castle, and it was necessary to determine how he should be disposed of.

“ Restore him to liberty ! (said the generous Baronefs.) — A gallant foe claims our courtesy. He lifted his arm only in the cause of gratitude, and it is not to him that I owe my

misfortune. But (added she) I will see him in the council chamber."

Geoffry departed to introduce the knight, and Matilda prepared with condescending dignity to perform the first act of power her new station had yet afforded.

She entered the council chamber, attended only by her faithful Theresa, and seated herself on a chair covered with black velvet. Her long mourning habit, being more simple than the usual dress of the times, gave an additional grace to her figure.—An air of solemnity checked the natural sprightliness of her looks, and
nothing

nothing but her youth seemed to detract from the dignity of her rank.

Geoffry soon entered, and led up to Matilda the young knight.

His aspect bespoke a soul of the most illustrious rank ; his movements were at once graceful and noble. He was in armour, but wore no helmet. He advanced towards the Baroness with an air respectful, yet firmly intrepid.

When arrived near her, the beauty, the manner, and the youth of her in whose power he now was, chased away that shade of stern independence

dence with which he at first fight appeared.

“ Noble stranger ! (said Matilda, in a voice full of sweetness,) you are free ! This castle is not the abode of captives. It was not you, it was the bloody Athelnay who robbed me of an only parent.—

“ Return (added she) to your friends, and suffer the keeper of the arms to replace the casque and shield which you have lost in the battle.— Disdain not this gift from a foe ;— and, wherever your valour shall lead you, let this signal soften in your mind

mind the remembrance of the Baron de Mainfroy."

While the Baronefs spoke, the young knight gazed on her with admiration; and, bending one knee with a gallant air, replied,

"From your hands, moſt courteous lady, I accept that liberty my ſoul had ſcorned to ſolicit.—The ſhield, the caſque, you deign to beſtow, ſhall warn me, whatever achievement courts my arm, to wear them only in the cauſe of juſtice or pity,—for ſuch only can their beautiful beſtower approve!"

So

So saying, he rose, and Matilda, making a sign to Geoffry to accompany him to the armory, bowed with a sweet and gentle air. The knight respectfully raised to his lips the edge of her scarf, and with a modest reluctance slowly followed the old steward.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Not only good and kind,
But strong and elevated was her mind :
A spirit that with noble pride
Could look superior down
On fortune's smile or frown ;
That could, without regret or pain ,
To Virtue's lowest duty sacrifice,
Or Interest, or Ambition's prize.

LYTTLETON.

N EARLY twelve months were
now elapsed since the death of
the Baron, and his daughter had
5 passed

passed them in pensive tranquillity.—
The remembrance of the young knight often occurred to her imagination.

His heroic deportment, the novelty of the dress of chivalry, formed a pleasing image to a soul like that of the Baroness, new to the world.—
The recollection of her vow failed not, in the moments of solitude, to recur to her thoughts, and frequently struck terror in her heart.

One day, as she was sitting in her apartment in the castle, with Theresa by her side, working embroidery,
a letter

a letter was brought to her, sealed with the royal signet. She started at the sight, but what were her sensations when she read as follows !

“ THE KING commends him
 “ to the Baroness de Mainfroy :—
 “ He greets her with good wishes,
 “ and desires her to prepare to ac-
 “ cept as a husband one of his nobles,
 “ who will prove deserving of that
 “ honour.

(Signed)

RICHARD.”

The

The Baroness shuddered as she read the short billet. The cruel alternative she had long dreaded was now approaching ; but, summoning all her fortitude, she waited with painful resignation, yet in trembling agitation some further notice. The faithful Theresa confirmed her heroic courage, and added vigour to her pious resolves.

At the end of six days, the Baroness was walking in the gallery over the council-chamber, when she heard a distant noise, as of trampling of hoofs.

She

She hastened to a window that looked into the inner court. The horn of the great gates blew a loud blast, and the porter soon appeared, crossing the court to bring some message to his lady. He came with the tidings that the Earl of Ilay, the Seneschal of the realm, with a vast retinue, demanded audience of the Baronefs.

Matilda, whose life was now a series of efforts at resignation, retired for a few moments to pay her devotion to St. Agatha, while she gave orders for the Seneschal to be admitted into the castle.

Having

Having recovered by a kind of forced sedateness, and invariably determined to persevere in her duty, she descended into the council-chamber.

Being seated, the Seneschal was introduced; he entered among a train of courtiers, leading by the hand a Baron clad in the most gorgeous array. Advancing to the Baroness, he presented him to her with the following address:

“ Lady Baroness, our sovereign presents to you Archibald, Earl of Effex, his favourite and secretary.— His grace informs you, that he has
6 destined

destined this Nobleman for your husband."

He ceased. The Earl of Essex, with a gallant air, bent one knee to the Baroness. In a speech full of flattery, yet in terms that plainly shewed a haughty confidence, he expressed a sense of his happiness.

While the Baroness, preserving for some time a delicate silence, was debating in her mind how to answer, she cast her eyes around, and what was her astonishment to behold among the attendant-knights of the Seneschal, one of the order of the Holy

VOL. I. F Sepulchre,

Sepulchre, whose helmet shewas well acquainted with.

She gazed again, and found in him the youth she had restored to liberty.

“ Ah ! (thought she,) — were that knight a Norman !”

The rigid delicacy of her noble soul checked the idea. She bowed gracefully to the knight, on whom the haughty Essex threw a disdainful frown, which the indignant knight returned.

The Baroness, without noticing the exchange of the angry glance, now, with a sweet voice, respectfully addressed

addressed the Seneschal, requesting him, with the Earl, to partake of a short banquet, after which she would return her answer to his royal master, thanking him for his generous concern for her welfare.

At the word *answer*, the Seneschal looked surprised, and the angry Essex forbore not to frown, but courtesy forbade them to do more.

During the banquet, the Barones could not help contrasting the sumptuous array of Essex with the plain grandeur of the young knight's surcoat. The Earl's mantle was studded with pearls, and she remarked with surprise

surprise that they frequently fell off. They were indeed on purpose ill fastened, to afford a pretext for bestowing them on the attendants of the Baronefs, who should pick them up, —a gallant method of conferring a present, consistent with the extravagant magnificence of the Earl's character.

The banquet over, the Senefchal and his attendants prepared to depart. The Earl with conscious pride awaited the Baronefs's answer.

With sentiments of strict propriety, she returned her answer, informing the Senefchal that she stood bound

by

by the most solemn engagement to form no alliance with a Saxon family.

While she spoke, tho' in the most gentle and courteous terms, the Seneschal shewed marks of astonishment, but the Earl was unable to restrain his resentment.

“What ! (exclaimed he,) shall the line of Ima, of Ethelwolf, of the great Alfred, be thought unworthy of uniting with a Norman race !”

He would have said more, but that gallantry for which he was renowned

renowned checked the torrent of his rage.

The Baroness, with a condescending frankness, related in brief the incident of her grandfather's death, which was yet recent in the memory of the whole court, with the fatal resentment cherished by her father against the Saxon nobles, and the vow he had obliged her to take.

The young knight gazed on her with a mixture of admiration and wonder,—the Earl in fullen surprise, and the Seneschal, who was a perfect courtier, afraid of the offended pride of Essex, calmly replied to the
Baroness,

Baroness, that he would bear back her answer to his royal master, and solicit his grace to allow her some weeks to consider of her final reply.

The Baroness, unwilling to urge her refusal, and happy to gain time, though firmly resolved, silently bowed her assent, and the Seneschal and his train took leave with less courteous ceremony than they had entered.

The Seneschal, as he departed, significantly said to the Baroness, "You are acquainted, madam, with the conditions of refusal."

She bent her head with a sedate look, that spoke a firm and calm resignation.

Effex, who before had accepted with joy his sovereign's favour, on account of Matilda's great possessions, felt his soul now roused by her beauty, her graceful deportment, and that sedate resolution that gave new charms to her youth.

On his return to court, he urged the King to force her compliance. — The young Knight had beheld the Baroness with no less admiration, yet more true reverence than the Earl; his soul was nobler, and venerated her

her exalted virtues with those heroic sentiments known only to the age of chivalry.

Hubert de St. Gervas, for that was the name of the Knight, was chief favourite of the Earl of Athelnay, and first among the military friends of himself and his brother the Seneschal.

The Earl, in an expedition to Normandy, accidentally passed a night in the convent of St. Gervas; among the lay-brothers, he was much struck with the appearance of a youth, who, at the sight of the Earl and his retinue in their military dresses,

dresses, seemed inspired with martial ardour.

He eyed their helmets, corsets, and every part of the coat of mail, with impatient delight ; and the Earl entering the apartment where he had left his sword and shield, surprised the young recluse, brandishing them with an air, as if accustomed to the burden.

The Earl, whose first passion was the love of arms, pleased with a disposition so congenial to his own, entertained an affection for him, and, by his interest with the Abbot, removed him from a life devoted to heaven,

to

to fight the righteous battle in the busy scenes of the world.

On inquiring of the Abbot the rank and family of the youth, the Earl was astonished to hear they were unknown. He had been brought, when a child, one night to the convent, by two persons, strangers to the monks, who left a considerable sum of money for his maintenance, with injunctions to the Abbot to educate him for a monastic life.

The Earl suffered not this to lessen his regard, and for some years Hubert had

had distinguished himself in the most difficult achievements, with an intrepidity that excited the jealousy of his peers.

On the Seneschal's return to court, he reported the answer of the Barones, and requested for her, as he had promised, a few weeks consideration for her final refusal.

The King, with an angry voice, exclaimed, "Be it so!—and, if the obstinate damsel prefers a convent to my favour, and the splendor of rank and wealth, I oppose her not."

When

When the King was withdrawn, Effex vented his impatient rage aloud ; and Hubert, extolling the exalted firmness of the Barones in adhering to her vow, he darted with irritated jealousy on the young Knight.

“ Perchance, (said he, in a severe and imperious tone,) you too covet the glory of being rejected by the haughty maid ? Had you been offered, she might have accepted a KNIGHT WHO BOASTS NO SAXON ANCESTRY ! — The obscurity of your race would easily have vanquished her scruples.”

Hubert,

Hubert, roused to rage, by the evident want of liberality in these discourteous insinuations, replied with the indignation of conscious virtue.

The presence of the Seneschal alone prevented him from unsheathing his sword, and defying the Earl to single combat.

When retired to his own apartment, a wish, that had long glowed in his heart, and given animation to his bosom, now broke out with unresisted violence. This was to discover, if possible, his family!

Hubert

Hubert did not long hesitate :—
he arrayed himself in complete ar-
mour, lacing on his head the hel-
met.

He now grasped the buckler,
which had been given him by Ma-
tilda, and chose a faithful squire,
named Odo, with whom, in spite
of the repeated advice and remon-
strances of his friendly protector,
the Earl of Athelnay, he set forward
on his hazardous and adventurous
expedition.

Hubert resolved to return no
more, until he could carry back the
name

name of his rightful family, and
imprinted their device on his shield
and armour.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

It must not be !—Thou first of angels, come !

Sweet filial Piety ! and firm my breast :

Yes ! let one daughter to her fate submit,—

Be nobly wretched,—but her father happy.

If misfortune come, she brings along

The bravest virtues.—

THOMSON.

THE Baronefs, in the mean time,
felt all the struggles that could
agitate a youthful mind. Her estates

must now be resigned, and she must either be immured for ever in a monastery, or fall from a state of splendor and affluence to indigence, but it was indigence purchased by noble intrepidity in the performance of duty.

She sighed to quit a world she had scarce seen, yet no other path presented itself consistent with propriety. With a reluctance, which she forced herself at length to overcome, she dispatched a letter to her aunt at Rouen, entreating her to receive her again to her protection.

With

With the greatest astonishment she learned, from the answer of one of the sisters, that her only surviving relation died after a few hours sickness.

With the answer came a packet, containing some relics, bequeathed to her by the Abbess, with her last benediction.

At these unexpected tidings, Matilda was nearly, for a time, overpowered. Affliction, for the loss of her aunt, anxiety for her own destitute situation, joined to agitate and oppress her gentle mind. That fortitude, at length,

length, which was her ruling virtue, restored her to resignation.

The prescribed time for her final refusal was now expired. A messenger arrived from the King to receive it. The Barones returned her reply, in the most respectful, and, at the same time, most resolute terms, informing the King that she was ready to resign to his Majesty those domains which, by the right of the laws, were now the property of her Sovereign.

When the messenger was departed, the faithful Geoffry rushed into the hall, and, in an agony of affection, bewailed

bewailed the fate of his beloved mistress.

"Let me follow you, lady, (said he,) wherever you go! — But, oh! must these grey hairs behold the rightful heir banished from this castle? — Cruel, cruel hour!"

With an affable dignity Matilda thanked the good steward, and begged him to place the account of her property in proper order, against the arrival of the King's officers to take possession of the castle, and to collect what rents were her due.

bewailed

“And if, faithful Geoffry, (added she,) you are resolved to partake my fortunes, we will retire to some quiet spot, with the little I shall have left. My good Theresa too, and you, Margaretta, will you not comfort your mistress?”

Theresa answered not. The tears that fell over her wrinkled cheeks spoke for her. Margaretta sobbed aloud, and with difficulty faltered,

“I will follow you, my kind lady, though you should walk barefoot to Jerusalem.”

“Thou;

"Thou, Geoffry, (continued Matilda smiling) hast been faithful to manage large possessions ;—thou wilt be a true steward of small wealth !"

With more attentive assiduity than they had ever shewn in her state of splendor, Geoffry and the affectionate Margareta left their lady to prepare for quitting the castle, and Theresa continued by her side.

The soul of Matilda felt an exultation at the consciousness of thus firmly performing her duty, which no other delight can ever inspire.

She triumphed, but it was a steady triumph ; not the transient animation of an instant. She knew that feeble humanity requires perpetual efforts to sustain an uniform conduct, and that, without the sober virtue of perseverance, an occasional start of fortitude could never claim the glory of merit.

The other domestics testified scarcely less affliction than those who were still to have the happiness of attending their mistress. They had enjoyed a serene tranquillity under the gentle command of Matilda, unknown

known to the government of the severe Baron.

They wept round her as she passed to her own apartment, and with a painful reluctance she informed them they must repair to the steward to receive her orders; but deferred their dismissal till she herself should leave the castle.

In a few days the proper officers arrived to take possession, in the King's name, of the antient structure, so long the abode of the family of Mainfroy, and all the surrounding domains.

They

They brought with them a letter from the King, containing a grant to the Baroness, to retain in her possession an old mansion belonging to her family, situated in a distant part of the kingdom,—an act of clemency, which, being unexpected, inspired Matilda with a pleasing satisfaction. This poor relic of her family-possessions was, in her present situation, a most precious treasure; thither she determined to retire with her faithful domestics.

On inquiring of Geoffry the state of the seat thus bestowed on her, she learned that it had been uninhabited.

bited nearly all the time he had lived in the family.

The Baron and his father had each entertained a dislike to the gloominess of the situation; and, being at enmity with some neighbouring Barons, had never visited the mansion. He added, that its ruinous state would certainly require some time to prepare it for her reception.

“No matter, (said the Baronefs.) I will repair thither directly; where else must I go?—Besides, it will be a pleasing amusement to my mind to trace the decayed grandeur of the mansion,

manſion, ſo agreeable to my own fate."

Thus reſolved, ſhe bade Margareta and Thereſa prepare for their journey, Geoffry having ſettled the affairs of the houſhold.

Before her departure, Matilda determined to viſit the ſubterranean chapel, where, kneeling over her father's remains, ſhe might return her thanks to heaven for thus enabling her to fulfil his commands.

Accordingly, the evening preceding her departure, with her faithful Thereſa alone, ſhe entered the tower leading

to

to the vaulted passage. Every step she took brought to her mind the image of her father; and, as she paced the passage, and entered the door of the chapel, she fancied she saw him, by her side, smile on her with a look of approbation.

Advancing up the aisle, the solemn stillness and gloom of the place struck the Baroness and Theresa with such awe, that they were both silent. — Matilda, leaving her companion by the altar, offering up her prayers before the Virgin's image, turned thro' the arch that led to her grandfather's tomb, by the side of which the

the Baron had been recently interred.

She gazed on the marble knight with an emotion of self-approbation, and, kneeling down, petitioned those beings who guard the righteous breast to continue her firm in the path of pious resignation.

Having passed nearly an hour in their devotions, with soft and trembling steps the Baroness and Theresa again paced the pavement of this secret place of devotion, frequently stopping to view the decorations of the shrines through which they passed, some being decked with a consecrated banner,

banner, the scull of a saint, or other precious relics.

Arrived at the door, Matilda threw a last look up the gloomy aisle, and, as she closed it, breathed a filial prayer for the rest of her father's soul.

The next morning, the Baroness prepared to depart. As she took a final leave of her dear, and now lost home, a thousand conflicting sensations crowded into her mind, and her fortitude had to sustain its most cruel trial.

She visited every apartment in the castle, breathed a sigh, and offered

up

up a prayer in each. To her own she bade a mournful farewell, that wrung her tender bosom.

The little altar and picture of St. Agatha she ordered to be conveyed from the closet, among the rest of the necessaries, to the mansion whither she was repairing.

The ruinous state of her new habitation made it requisite that some furniture should be collected, in order to render it habitable; but she absolutely forbade any one to forerun her in entering this desolate abode, anxious to see it in its present state.

Geoffry,

Geoffry, and the confederate Theresa, provided whatever was proper for the accommodation of their mistress; and, carefully packing up the few remains of her household possessions, placed them on two horses, which a hired peasant was ordered to lead to a small village at a little distance from the mansion.

The disconsolate, but steady-minded Matilda now passed through the great hall to mount the steed prepared to convey her from the castle of her ancestors for ever.

Here her distressed domestics assembled to pay their last tribute of affectionate

affectionate duty to their beloved lady, again attacked her firmness.

They crowded to catch her eye, and, as if she had possessed the venerable gravity of age, begged her benediction.

She stretched out her hand to them all, and with a struggling voice commended them to heaven. The tears that rolled down her lovely cheeks destroyed not the steadfast resignation of her aspect. "She nobly yoked a smiling with a sigh," and, passing through the afflicted group, with swift yet steady steps, hastened to the
outer

outer court, where Geoffry's hand, trembling more with grief than age, presented her horse.

She mounted the faithful creature, which had so often borne her with light and sportive hoof along the pleasing shades of the neighbouring forest: Theresa, Margaretta, and Geoffry, followed.

The young and beautiful Baroness thus resigned her vast possessions in inflexible obedience to the solemn vow dictated by a parent. Even the King's officers who beheld her depart, pursued her with admiring regret.

With a slow pace she issued from the gates :—as they closed behind her, she shuddered ; but, advancing onwards, the exultation of conscious integrity invigorated her soul, and, ascending a gentle acclivity that rose in the front of the castle, she turned to give a last farewell, wiping away with her white scarf the tears that dimmed her sight.

Her mournful attendants possessed less fortitude. Margaret sobbed aloud, and Theresa and Geoffry struggled to suppress their lamentations for the fate of their lovely mistress.

The

The sad party pursued their way ; they had gained the summit of the hill, and, descending on the other side, every step they took diminished the castle to their sight. Still lower and lower sunk the much-loved structure. The walls soon vanished ; the body of the towers next disappeared ; the battlements that crested their tops remained in view for some time ; the pennons that waved on the turrets were now alone visible. Matilda stopped her steed, bidding these beloved signals another and another last farewell : then, slowly spurring the tardy horse, who seemed almost conscious he had quitted his hospitable manger to return no more. She

descended on, and the next time she turned to gaze, the sky and summit of the hill had closed, and shut from her view every glimpse of an abode, resigned for ever !

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

The thistle shook there its lonely head ; the moss whistled to the wind ;— the fox looked out from the windows ;—the rank grass of the wall waved round its head.

OSSIAN.

THE Baronefs and her attendants travelled slowly for the space of three days. On the morning of the
H 4 third,

third, they descried at a distance their destined home ; but, through the winding of the track, evening was approaching ere they reached the neighbouring village..

Geoffry entered it to order the peasant, with his loaded horses, to hasten to the mansion, and to provide some provisions.

Matilda, with her maids, lingered till he again joined them. Leaving the village, they perceived the domains of the mansion to begin by the fragments of the garden-walls. As they advanced, these boundaries grew

more entire, and were here and there secured by small embattled turrets.

Turning round an angle, they entered a long desolate lane, on one side of which the walls rose high.—Ancient ivy trees shot their twisted trunks through the midway of the walls, as if scorning the nutriment of the earth, and collecting their plentiful foliage, crowned the tops with heavy eye-brows, that, hanging over, seemed to fowl on their beauteous mistress as she passed below. The wall ended in the front of the mansion, and Matilda felt her heart grow chill as she gazed on her new habitation.

The

The edifice was of large extent ; it had formerly been a hunting seat ; but several Barons of Mainfroy, before the time of the two last, having resided here, they had repeatedly added great additions, and fortified it till it now wore a castle-like appearance.

It was irregularly square, forming the four sides of a large court. The two front angles were strengthened by round towers, and the other two by square ones.

The Baroness stood in silent contemplation of the gloomy buildings,
till

till awakened by Geoffry approaching the great gate-way, with several large and rusty keys.

The peasant with his charge stood waiting by, and Theresa and Margareta trembled as the hoarse hinges, long disused, creaked at the efforts which Geoffry, assisted by the peasant, made to unclosethe gates.

Matilda, stepping forward, was the first to pass the threshold. She entered a gloomy hall, rendered more obscure by the darkness of the evening.

The

The roof, with a height that almost mocked the eye, was raised on the shoulders of several gigantic statues, whose long shadows still deepened the darkness of the place.

Margaretta shrieked as she entered, but the Baroness, recovering her own resolution, which at the first sight of this dreary entrance had been staggered, encouraged her in a firm tone.

Leaving the peasant to unload the horses, she desired Geoffry to proceed, that they might choose her apartment.

Hastily

Hastily traversing the hall, they ascended a few stairs which led to a spacious vaulted gallery; at the upper end they passed through a Gothic arch over three steps, each formed of a single beam of timber much worn.

Here they perceived a flight of stone stairs, which, dividing at a small area, led on one hand to the right, and on the other to the left wing of the front buildings.

The darkness of the place, the uncertainty of the apartments, now staggered even the Barones, who, stopping at the foot of the stairs,

stairs dispatched Geoffry to kindle a lamp.

“ St. Michael defend us ! (exclaimed Margareta, when he was gone, as she dropped on one of the stairs,) whither are we going ?—Must we pass the night here ?”

“ This is our only habitation, (replied the Baroness, trying to re-assure her ;)— it appears sad and desolate, but our cheerfulness will soon make even these frowning walls look gay.”

Theresa, breaking silence, and supporting her aged frame against a corner

corner of the wall, joined her admonitions to those of her mistress.

The distant flashing of Geoffry's lamp, as he hastened through the hall, again affrighted the timid Margareta. The Baroness and her venerable domestic, though they partook of the superstition which their convent had instilled, combated the fearful emotion by good sense and resolution.

Geoffry preceding, they now advanced up the stairs leading to the left, which admitted them into a second gallery of long extent.

The

The Baroness stopped at a folding door, magnificently ornamented with gilded trophies. She gently tried it with her hand, half afraid it would admit her into some apartment as gloomily forbidding as the hall. It gave way, and she entered a spacious anti-chamber that discovered an aspect of uncommon grandeur, though grandeur in decay.

The walls were of beautiful stucco work, but obscured and defaced by time. The roof, adorned with grotesque paintings, was supported by pillars of antique marble. The windows were heavy, and ornamented with devices and armorial bearings.

Matilda

Matilda staid not long to regard this sumptuous room, but hastened to a door on the right hand; it brought her to a smaller apartment, hung with faded damask.

This, without farther delay, she determined to make her own, and dispatched Geoffry and Theresa to bring the necessary accommodations. Margaretta, trembling to return, yet afraid to obey, clung to her mistress's side, who, sitting down on a low couch, struggled to suppress the involuntary sigh that heaved her bosom, and to reconcile herself to her only abode.

The effort was not long : her soul was too noble to regret the luxury of her former habitation, and the sedate triumph of fulfilled duty soon gave a delightful serenity to her mind.

The apartment was dark, for Geoffry had taken away the lamp ; yet the solemnity of the place, as she saw herself alone with the trembling Margaretta, who scarcely breathed, could not now inspire a single fear.

She felt as if guarded by the approving spirit of her father ; and, while the hollow blasts now roared over the turrets above, and now in more appalling sounds rustled along

the loose hangings of the room : secure, undaunted, in spite of her natural superstition, nothing could now give a tremor to her composed frame.

She arose from her seat, and with difficulty opening the casement of a lofty window, gazed calmly on the vast mass of buildings which composed the mansion. The mist of the evening gave a terrific aspect to the turrets, battlements, and corners of half-desolated ramparts, which seemed crowded together in lone and fullen grandeur.

The scene frowned, but the mind of Matilda could not now fear. — She stood contentedly meditating, when she was roused by the sound of footsteps.

Supposing it was Geoffry and Theresa, she felt no alarm ; but, listening, found with surprise they proceeded from the side opposite to that of the anti-chamber. A shade of fear stole across her soul as the noise drew near.

Margaretta shrieked ; but the Baroness, rousing her resolution, caught the trembling girl by the arm, and, stepping

stepping to the door of the antichamber, held it in her hand, and calmly waited the event. Voices were now heard confusedly, and through a crevice of the hangings, a dancing light was admitted.

The Baroness now retreated into the antichamber, when Geoffry, Theresa, and the peasant with faggots for a fire, breaking into the apartment from the place whence the light proceeded, she hurried back, ashamed to have feared.

Geoffry, mistaking the turning of the stairs at the area, had rambled
 1. 3 through.

through a long range of apartments, till, unknown to him, they led round to the room in which he left the Baronefs, where he perceived a door, unseen on the other fide, through the artful joining of the hangings. Burfting it open, he was furprised to find himfelf in the place he had fought in vain.

The Baronefs was now irrefolute whether to continue in her chofen apartment, on account of its leading to fo many others; but, reflecting that Therefa and Margarett might inhabit that neareft to her own, and Geoffry accommodate himfelf in thofe

at

at the beginning of the fuite, she was now more than before pleased with her choice, being thus assured that all avenues leading to her own apartment were secured.

A fire was now kindled on the hearth. Theresa and Margaretta with busy care arranged and furnished the apartment; and, leaving the Baroness to her own reflections, retired to seek the kitchen, Margaretta in the hurry of her employment having lost some of her fears.

The Baroness took care to have the picture of St. Agatha and the little altar carefully brought and

1 4

placed

placed in a spacious recess between the pillars in the anti-chamber; here, while her attendants were withdrawn, she kneeled down, and paid her evening devotions.

Therefa and Margareta soon returned with a supper of boiled fish. The resigned Matilda partook with pious thankfulness the frugal meal, and the securing of the gates being left to Geoffry, who retained the peasant that night to assist him, the new inhabitants of the desolate mansion sunk in soft repose.

The next morning, the Baroness, who had risen early, walked with
Therefa.

Theresa to view the gardens. They entered them from the end of the lower gallery, and with much difficulty forced their way through the brambles and rubbish that overspread the walks.

Long avenues of heavy chestnuts terminated in lofty terraces that overlooked from the heights of the walls the country around.

It was composed of bleak barren hills, broken only by a few solitary clumps of antient oaks. Beneath the walls a sluggish loitering stream seemed to partake the dull inactivity of the objects around.

Here

Here Matilda with pleasure observed, still existing, a heronry. The sight of living animals in her lonely domains gave her a kind of social satisfaction.

She recollected that these birds, living only on fish, were canonical food fast days. This might prove a great convenience, but her soul rejected the idea as a treacherous insinuation, and she determined to treat them as innocent friends, whose manners and peculiar notes would afford her pleasing matter for amusing contemplation.

As

As they still lingered on the terrace, Matilda, with condescending kindness lending her arm to support the aged Theresa, whose feeble frame had been weakened by her journey and exertions, Geoffry approached, and, presenting the young peasant, informed the Baroness he had been interceding to continue in her service.—

“ The culture of these gardens, (added Geoffry,) will be a pleasant and healthy employment to me, and, would your ladyship allow me Pascal for a labourer, I should want no more.”

“ Excellent

“Excellent Geoffry ! (exclaimed the Barones,)—canst thou, hitherto accustomed to ease and plenty, thus cheerfully undertake a life of such labour ?”

“Exercise, lady, (returned the faithful steward,) is the health of old men :—— and shall I behold the daughter of my noble master walking over weeds and briars !—Haste thee to the village, Pascal :—bring us tools, and let us begin our work immediately.”

The peasant, overjoyed, was hurrying from the terrace, when Matilda,
after.

after musing a few minutes, recalled him.

“Hast thou a sister, (she asked,) who would like to become my servant?—Margaretta will want an assistant.”

Still more delighted he replied,—that his father had a numerous family, that his eldest sister was an industrious girl, and would be transported with her good fortune.

Matilda, pleased with this arrangement of her little household, sat down with Theresa in an arbour at the end of the terrace, formed by the twisted

roots and branches of a venerable ash. One side of the wall still remaining, shewed it had once been a summer-house, and the stone seats, curiously carved, discovered the laborious care, and grotesque taste of ancient gardening.

This was a spot that engaged the fancy of the Baroness, who was now less lively, yet still as serene as she was wont to be.

The lonely prospect of the surrounding hills,—their slow ascents, breaking into abrupt and unconnected valleys, and shivering the grey
marle,

marle, — then spreading their sober brown surface in fullen repose, tinted with the yellow bloom of the gorse, and the lively green of the fern,—was to her an interesting view. The village was just visible from the arbour, the little cottages peeping through a grove of ash trees.

Matilda, as she gazed round, made no comparison of the scene with the stately gardens she once possessed.—

Happy in her own consciousness, and the kind attentions of her little faithful household, she recalled the luxury, the splendour of the castle,
only

only to applaud the sacrifice she had made.

When she left the gardens, she met the young peasant, returned already with a neat homely girl, whom Margaretta with rapture received as her assistant.

Blest with a companion, she now ventured to explore the desolate offices adjoining the kitchen, whose lofty stone roof, and windows high from the ground, with heavy flanchions, seemed now less dismal. The carved benches were soon orderly arranged, and all the culinary articles disposed with neatness.

To

To view the whole of her new possessions was to the Baroneſs a work of many days. Every expedition ſhe took in the manſion brought to light ſomething that intereſted her.

In one of the deſolate apartments ſhe found the remains of a library, conſiſting of decayed manuſcripts, and works of the provincial poets;—in others, ſome mouldering portraits, coats of armour, ſtandards, and trophies, won from neighbouring barons or foreign foes.

In a ſhort time, that part of the manſion which the Baroneſs inhabited,

being on the Southern side of the court wore a brighter appearance.

This desolate aspect was in some measure obliterated by the new arrangements, but there still remained a solemn air of mouldering grandeur in the gloomy hall, the spacious galleries, and wide stair-case, that were necessarily a part of the appropriated buildings.

Serene, and satisfied with herself, Matilda tranquilly resigned her youth, her beauty, and those few accomplishments her convent had bestowed, but which, in her graceful hands, acquired

acquired worth and dignity to the lonely and remote solitude of this desolate abode.

As she sat embroidering, with Theresa by her side, or walked on her favourite terrace, the idea of the gallant Hubert darted across her mind, like some amiable phantom sent to enliven the solitary scene.

Impressed with this affecting recollection, she recalled with delight his courteous air, his exalted aspect, and thought the plumes of the helmet she had herself bestowed, waved

with a grace over his brow, which they never possessed before.

“Dost thou know (she asked Theresa) of what family is that young Knight, so favoured by the Earl of Athelnay.—Is he a Saxon?” she was going to add, but her exquisite delicacy stopped the latter question.

This was too tender a subject to say any more upon, and glanced too near the prohibition in which she stood ; she therefore continued silent.

The good Theresa loved to dwell on an object pleasing to her lady,
and,

and, without remarking the feelings which agitated her, bestowed her sober praise on the accomplished unknown.

C H A P. VII.

Lo ! as the surpliced train draw near
To this last mansion of mankind,
The slow sad bell, the sable bier,
In holy musings wrap the mind !
And while their beam,
With trembling stream,
Attending tapers faintly dart ;
Each mould'ring bone,
Each sculptur'd stone,
Strikes mute instruction to the heart !

MALLET.

THE Convent of St. Gervas,
where Sir Hubert had been
educated, seemed the most proper
place

place to afford him the intelligence he sought.

Hither accordingly he directed his way, and immediately embarked for Normandy. He arrived at St. Gervas on the vigil of the feast of St. Nicholas, and, judging the holy fathers might be at their devotions, he advanced leisurely.

The deepening glooms had now involved the scenes around, and the towers and turrets, marked only by a darker hue, just served to direct his way.

Leaving Odo and his steed at some distance, he advanced alone to the monastery. He could now distinguish the walls of the gardens, and soon after spied a faint light gleam through the stained glass of a window.

This he knew to be the conventual church. The mistletoe, that twined up the carved stone work of the window, almost obscured the light; yet it returned at times as if arising from tapers passing within.

The hollow tolling of the bell proclaimed the hour of the second
compline,

compline, or evening devotions. He waited awhile, unwilling to disturb the solemn rites. Soon a second tolling of the bell was heard ; but in a more awful strain it announced the moment in which a soul was passing to its everlasting home.

When the warning sounds had ceased, whose beseeching voice thus requests the prayers of the living, Sir Hubert entered the convent.

As he passed the court, the holy recluses crouded round him, eager to know what business led to their peaceful habitation a person whose profession was arms.

The

The Knight unclosed his vizor, and they recollected the features of their young lay-brother. The good fathers welcomed with delight the youth whose gentle manners had engaged all their affections.

He returned the greeting of each venerable friend with reverence and joy ; but soon were his pleasing emotions checked, when one of the order informed him that the passing bell just rung had tolled for the soul of their holy Superior the Abbot.

The tears of the monks confirmed the tidings, and Sir Hubert not only
lamented

lamented for the venerable instructor of his youth, but grieved at thus finding the purpose of his voyage frustrated.

“ I beseech you, (continued Father Henry, who spoke before,) to meet me in my cell, when you have refreshed yourself. — I have something to communicate,” added he, in a low voice.

Sir Hubert, having dispatched an attendant for his squire, entered the Refectory, and partook of the temperate repast which the convent allowed. When the fathers were retired,

retired, he followed Father Henry to his cell, who, closing the door, thus began.

“ You are already acquainted in what manner you were brought to our convent. Your birth and family were unknown to us all. You likewise know the conference held on this subject between the Abbot and the Earl of Athelnay, who took you from this holy life. The Abbot then informed him he knew nothing of your origin.

“ When it pleased heaven to call back the soul of our blessed Superior,
ere

ere he resigned his breath, he called me to his bed side, and, giving into my hands a small parcel, spoke thus to me.

“ Should you again have the hap-
 “ piness of seeing the brave youth, Hu-
 “ bert, deliver this carefully to him; tell
 “ him, that it contains the only hint
 “ of his family that was given to me
 “ in charge with himself. The per-
 “ sons who delivered him to my care,
 “ in giving me this parcel, accompa-
 “ nied it with strict injunctions to
 “ preserve it secret. On this ac-
 “ count I was bound not to discover
 “ it to the Earl of Athelnay; but
 “ the

“ the youth being now in the world,
 “ and none of his kindred having
 “ made search for him, it were surely
 “ right that this only mark of his
 “ birth should, if possible, be resto-
 “ red to himself.”

“ He said no more, (continued
 Father Henry.) The will of heaven
 hath conducted you at this moment
 to receive the Abbot’s bequest; and
 with it too, I deliver (added the ve-
 nerable Monk, stretching his hand
 over Hubert’s head,) his fatherly be-
 nediction.”

Hubert, with a tear of grateful joy
 took the parcel, and eagerly opening
 it,

it, found it contained only a ribbon, on which was embroidered by a female hand a device or coat of arms. The design was a damsel leading a knight in armour, as if directing him to the tournament.

Enchanted with this clue to his family, Hubert returned his thanks to the good father; yet still he was perplexed to know whether it would be better to confine his search to Normandy or England.

Father Henry could not recollect whether the persons who brought him to the convent, when a child, had
the

the appearance of Normans, which determined him to return to England; but piety and gratitude demanded that he should pay the last sad tribute at the funeral of the Abbot ere he quitted the monastery.

In a few days, the remains of the Abbot were borne to the conventual church in all the solemn pomp of burial.

The awful spectacle for a while obliterated from the mind of Sir Hubert his own concerns,—a spectacle so different to the scenes of war and military evolutions he had long witnessed.

The

The slow moving figures of the monks, clad in black cassocks and white scapularies,—the sacred light of the consecrated tapers, glimmering through the long aisles, and blazing on the splendid decorations of the high altar,—the voice of the choir, now swelling to notes of holy ecstasy, and now softly echoing through the cloisters, all conjoined to form a scene that created a devout pause in the mind, and seemed to prohibit every earthly idea as profane.

Sir Hubert returned to his apartment with a soul as pious as if he had never mingled in the croud of human society.

The succeeding morning recalled him to mortal concerns; yet still, amid their busy instigations, the sedate zeal of devotion held its proper seat.

He took leave of the good fathers with affectionate regret; particularly Father Henry, whose chief favourite he had been; as, when he resided in the convent, he was constantly employed as his assistant in transcribing ancient manuscripts.

Hastening from the convent, Sir Hubert prepared to set sail for the English coast. He had already engaged a vessel; the steeds were embarked, and himself hastening towards

towards the creek where the ship laid, when a party of armed men surpris'd him from behind a projection in the rock.

They seized him by his arms, tore away his sword, and, in spite of the furious efforts he made to disengage himself, bore him back.

They flew with impetuosity along the coast, keeping near to the sea, till they gained the foot of a rock, crowned with a fortress, whose lofty turrets seem'd to defy the waves that raged below.

The dark hues of approaching twilight now confused the varied aspect

of the landscape; but Sir Hubert could distinguish that his guards were conveying him to the fort.

They ascended sometimes by hewn steps, and sometimes on a narrow ridge of the rock, that afforded a steep and winding path up the acclivity. After much toiling and caution, on account of the darkness, they arrived near the summit; and one of the guards, stopping at the gates of the fortress, blew a horn that depended from an iron chain.

The creaking portals were soon unclosed, and a person appeared, to admit

admit the party. He was dressed in a short black doublet ; through the flashings of the sleeves appeared a crimson cloth ; he wore a velvet cap with a short feather hanging over one ear ; and this particular head-dress gave to full view his dark and scowling brows, on which the light of his lamp threw a strong gleam.

Sir Hubert, between his guards, now entered a court, whose spacious extent was to the eye diminished by the loftiness of the surrounding walls, the ramparts, and the still more soaring summits of the towers.

Hubert, as he passed, though stunned with astonishment at his unexpected and unaccountable seizure, examined with earnestness the place through which he was passing.

He discerned many grates in the wall, near the pavement of the court ; and, gazing intently upon them, as the light of the lamp danced wavering about, he spied through one a human arm, known only by its movement to be living, trying to thrust its withered bony fingers thro' the bars of the grate.

The

The appearance of this single limb of some devoted wretch struck into his soul more pitying terror for the object, than apprehension of what horrors he himself might be leading to.

Turning to the right of the court, the porter, followed by the guards, entered a small iron door. It admitted them to a passage so long, that the lamp was too feeble to shew its extent ; they hastily traversed it, the end terminating in a flight of steps that descended very deep below.

When they arrived at the bottom of the stairs, they were admitted into a second passage, still longer than the first, full of small recesses, formed in the walls, which terminated in doors barred with iron, as if they were the inlets of dungeons.

Arrived at the midway of the passage, one of the guards, stepping before the porter, turned into a recess, desiring him to raise his lamp, while he applied a large antique key to the door.

After a few violent exertions in turning the key, the door gave way, and the other guards advancing with
Hubert,

Hubert, led him within; then, all hastily retiring, they closed the door, barring it on the outside, and fastening it with massy bolts, so that there was no possibility of his escape.



CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Have I not hideous death within my view,
Retaining but a quantity of life,
Which bleeds away, e'en as a form of wax
Resolveth from its figure 'gainst the fire ?

SHAKESPEARE.

SIR Hubert was left in darkness
and astonishment ; but that in-
trepid spirit, which spurned alike
both

both danger and misfortune when undeserved, rendered him tranquil even amid anxiety and apprehension, though the frustration of his favourite project gave him frequent pangs of regret.

He could distinguish nothing of the apartment in which he was inclosed, as through the bars of a grate only a tinge of sky was discernable, that shot but a faint shade of light into the gloomy den. He felt round to find a seat, and, stumbling on something like a stone bench, he threw himself on it almost in despair.

Amid

Amid the tumult of his reflections, the beautiful Baroness oft presented herself to his fancy. Her dignified, yet simple manners,—her noble resolution, and her greatness of soul, in so strictly adhering to her vow, even to the loss of all the splendour of rank and fortune,—had enchanted at once his understanding and fancy.

“Were I a Norman!” would secretly rise in his heart, at every picture that memory painted of the illustrious Matilda.

Lost in these meditations, he measured not the time : his cell was in
gloom.

gloom, when he was roused by a figure on the opposite wall.

He turned his eye to the grate, and found it was the shadow of a centinel passing with a light on the outer side.

This inspired a hope that morning might soon approach; nor was he deceived. A dusky gleam of dawn stole slowly through his grate, and at length discovered the bare and desolate walls, scratched with many a figure and rude character,—the sad records of imprisoned wretchedness.

Nothing

Nothing like furniture was to be seen. The bench on which he sat was hewn in the wall, and he spied above it a carving that seemed intended for a crucifix, hollowed from the wall by the hand of some victim, whose patient labour thus beguiled the tedious hours ; and at the same time kindled in his breast the sacred glow of pious zeal to cheer his torments.

Having contemplated his cell for some time, he returned to his meditations, from which he was soon roused by the noise of the key turning in the door of his dungeon.

The

The person who had admitted him into the fortress the preceding evening now made his appearance. He brought a bottle of wine, and cakes of meal, for the subsistence of his captive.

Sir Hubert, in a distant yet courteous address, besought to know the reason of his confinement; but the keeper, setting down his provisions with a look of mysterious silence, departed.

The Knight, scorning to despair, and animating his courage by looking on his ribbon, the precious clue
to

to his ardent design of discovering his family, resigned himself to patient musing.

Evening approached, and the keeper again appeared with the allowed food. As he silently departed, in closing the door, Sir Hubert perceived the door of an opposite cell half-open, and discerned, by the faint remaining light, something moving within. It seemed not to walk, but to drag itself along in an uncommon manner. Unlike the appearance of a man, it yet bore a tendency to human shape, but in such a horrid form, that it shocked his manly soul.

In curious wonder Hubert gazed till the door was closed. He passed the night in deep musing on this extraordinary figure; and, when the keeper came in the morning, watched the door with eagerness, but the opposite one was shut.

He listened attentively at his own door, to catch if possible some sounds that might discover if any human being was immured in this neighbouring dungeon.

He fancied at times he could distinguish a low muttering, as of inarticulate prayers; at other times,

a confused murmur, as of half-suppressed lamentations. The gentle soul of the Knight melted at the surmise of distress, while the strange sight he had seen in the cell confused his judgment.

Several days passed, in which Hubert still listened at his door, and still heard noises that engaged by turns pity and curiosity.

One evening the keeper appeared much earlier than usual, and, for the first time, broke silence in the following manner.

“ Sir

“Sir Knight (said he) this is the eve of the feast of St. Justin, and the Governor permits the prisoners to pay their devotions in a small chapel at the end of this passage, in which you may join, if you please.”

Sir Hubert with pleasure accepted the offer of this short deliverance from his confinement : though so transitory, it shot a gleam of transport through the soul of Hubert, which not only, through the pious clemency of the Governor, allowed him the consolation of prayer, but he hoped, in passing the passage, to have a further view into the cell from which the noise had issued, and in which he had seen the uncommon appearance.

Following the keeper therefore with delight, he left his dungeon, and pursued his guide till they entered a small chapel, through a grated door, which was instantly closed : it was half hewn in the rock, and the rest of the structure formed of massy stone.

A single lamp placed on the altar was all the illumination that discovered the melancholy aspect of this place of devotion. A monk stood by the altar, prepared to say mass.

Hubert, whose religious ardour suffered no other idea to interrupt it, paid his devotions with calm
humility ;

humility ; but, when the service was ended, anxiously gazed round the chapel on the rest of his companions.

A cool and soft breeze, as if from the sea, blew through a latticed Gothic window, and revived the animal spirits of Hubert, depressed by confinement in a close cell. As he breathed the refreshing gale, that seemed to talk of liberty, he threw his eye with a pang of compassion on three or four pale and lean prisoners, whose languid looks had caught a transient animation from the solace of that sacred devotion,—the last comforting cordial that lingers in the cup of human life. He

gave them all he had to bestow, the sigh of commiseration, and the secret prayer of intercession to heaven for their release.

By the side of his keeper, who now seemed to wear a gentler aspect, he left the chapel with regret ; when, at a distance, in the long passage, he spied the same figure he had seen in the cell opposite his own, moving along the pavement.

He intreated the keeper, in a voice and accent which commanded compliance, to raise his lamp higher, and suffer him to view this strange object of human misery.

They

They had now reached it ; and Hubert, gazing with eagerness, beheld a visage distorted, and so lean, that it seemed like the skin of a human face stretched over a scull. The rest of the form was alike shapeless.

“ Who art thou ? ” cried the Knight, in a tender tone.

The wretched figure at these words rolled his body on one side, and lifting up his eyes, which were sunk deep in their sockets, with a look of gratitude for the gentleness of the expression, replied, “ I am a human creature, whose limbs have been all

dislocated by the torture :—my whole body is emaciated, and my bones out of joint.”

“ And how long (exclaimed the astonished and compassionate Hubert) hast thou been confined in this place?”

“ Twenty years !” returned the unfortunate and miserable object.

Here the keeper interrupted them, and was hurrying the Knight to his cell ; but Hubert, anxious to converse with this victim to misfortune, supplicated him in so imploring and ardent a manner, that he at length relented.

“ Well,

“ Well, (said he to Sir Hubert,) to-morrow night I will procure you one half-hour of conversation with the prisoner, provided you speak low, that you may not be overheard.”

Satisfied with this concession in the Knight, thanking his keeper, bade a pitying adieu to his unhappy fellow-prisoner ; who, dragging his stiff disjointed limbs with a gliding movement to his cell, turned on Hubert a glance of thankfulness, and, heaving himself through the door, was barred in by the keeper.

Hubert waited with the most impatient anxiety for the ensuing evening.

ing, and the distant sound of the keeper's steps, and the undrawing the bolts of his dungeon, was a welcome signal that his curiosity would soon be gratified.

His guard entered with the usual provisions, and, setting them down, "You may now (said he) follow me to the opposite dungeon."

Hubert obeyed with joy, and the keeper, leading him to the door of the opposite cell, departed, informing him he should soon return.

The Knight, entering, beheld the unhappy captive stretched upon a mattress of coarse woollen cloth.—The dungeon was as desolate and unfurnished

unfurnished as that allotted for the Knight, except a small table, on which laid a crucifix, the companion of his melancholy hours.

Hubert had obtained from the guard a lamp, which he set down on the table, and as the prisoner waved his hand, approaching the mattress, he threw himself by his side on the pavement, and thus began.

“ Pardon, unhappy mortal, the intrusion of a stranger ;—he comes not to insult your misfortunes :—he too is a captive, and would console, would alleviate, by his sympathy, thy sufferings and misfortunes.”

“ Kind

“ Kind unknown ! (replied the captive, tears stealing down his skinny cheek,)—thou art not surely of the race of man !—Never did I again hope to hear such grateful sounds of pity till he, who has suffered me to be tortured here below, should raise me to those regions where angels shall comfort and reward me for all my sufferings.”

“ Thou art patient ! (exclaimed Hubert ;)— thou art pious !—Ah ! tell me thy misfortunes, that I may blush to repine at my own.”

“ Thou shalt hear them immediately, (returned the prisoner;) but know,
6 that

that I must trust to thy ear what
no one before hath learned from me.
—Close the door, and listen.”

Hubert obeyed, and the prisoner
thus began his melancholy, affecting,
and uncommon story.

END OF VOL. I.



